

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Lose Your Life.*"

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's Gospel verse-by-verse and we find ourselves at **Luke 9:24**.

When I used to teach elementary school, they used to encourage us to make, "*self-directed reflective learners.*" This is a fancy way of simply saying, "Teaching students to learn." The idea is there's so much for students to learn you'll never be able to teach them everything, so instead teach them to teach themselves.

I think of that often as a pastor...

- There's so much of the Bible to learn, no pastor could ever teach his congregation everything.
- I only get one 50-minute sermon per week!

But I can try to give you tools that help you teach yourself – or in other words – I can give you tools that help you learn the Bible.

This morning is going to be one of those sermons that I hope to give you one of those tools, and the tool is understanding the paradoxical nature of the Bible's teaching.

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I want to get a little momentum into teaching this by asking a simple question: does God look at things the same way we look at things? No, not at all.

And this brings us to Lesson 1...

## **LESSON 1: GOD SEES THINGS DIFFERENTLY THAN US.**

You can probably think back to the way you viewed certain things:

- When you were a child...
- Or when you were an unbeliever...
- Or even the way you viewed things a few years ago...

And because you've matured and grown since then in your understanding and knowledge, you view things differently now.

If you're a parent, you know you view things differently than your children. Part of parenting is getting your children to view things the right way, which often means getting them to view things differently than the way they view them. This happens b/c parents have more wisdom and understanding than their children.

If we consider how much more wisdom and understanding God has than us, it's going to follow that He sees things MUCH differently than us. The two verses that best capture this are **Isa 55:8-9**...

**8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.  
9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.**

**Micah 4:12a** says something similar. The prophet said, **“They do not know the thoughts of the LORD; they do not understand his plan.”**

When Job was suffering he repeatedly said that he wanted an audience with God. Listen to what Zophar said to him...

**Job 11:5 [If] God would speak and open his lips to you, 6b and...tell you the secrets of wisdom! For he is manifold in understanding. 7 “Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? 8 It is higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?**

So Job said he wanted to speak to God, but Zophar told him he wouldn't understand. God's wisdom and understanding are too great.

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Now follow me for a moment...

We call the Bible the Word of God so often I think we can forget what that means...

It means:

- The Bible is what God wants to say to us.
- It's His revelation of truth.
- Scripture is how God teaches us and reveals wisdom to us.

But since God sees things so much differently than us, how is this truth and wisdom going to sound to us?

- It's going to sound confusing.
- Some of it might not make sense.
- At times it's even going to sound untrue and contradictory.

But God's revelation is still true...and this brings us to Lesson 2...

## **LESSON 2: PARADOXES PRESENT CONTRADICTIONARY STATEMENTS THAT ARE TRUE.**

A paradox is a statement that seems contradictory, inconsistent, untrue, or even absurd, but is still true...and there are a number of paradoxes in Scripture!

Here are a few:

- **2 Cor 6:8b We are treated 9a as unknown, and yet well known** (you can't be unknown and known) ...**10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing** (being sorrowful is the opposite of rejoicing); **as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.**
  - You can't be poor and rich
  - You can't have nothing and everything
- Twice, in **2 Cor 12:10** and **2 Cor 13:9** Paul said, **“When we are weak we are strong.”** Obviously you can't be weak and strong.
- **James 1:2** says, **“Count it all joy when you fall into various trials.”** Joy is the opposite of what you feel when you're experiencing trials.

Here's a list of paradoxical truths in Scripture, and as I read them I suspect certain verses will come to mind:

- We see unseen things.
- We conquer by yielding or submitting.
- We serve others to be great.
- We choose to be last to be first.
- We give to receive.
- We find victory by glorying in our infirmities.
- We find rest under a yoke.
- We become wise by being fools for Christ's sake.
- We are made free by becoming slaves...slavery is the opposite of freedom.

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The OT is meant to provide us with examples:

- **Rom 15:4** says the OT **was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.**
- **1 Cor 10:6** says accounts in the OT **took place as examples for us...** and **verse 11** says they **happened...as an example, [and] written down for our instruction.**

When we read the OT we see many of these paradoxes in action. Here are two examples...

David had a terribly selfish, and prideful son named Adonijah. Listen to this verse and tell me what paradox will play out...

**1 Kin 1:5 Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, “I will be king.” And he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him.**

Adonijah exalted himself, and what did Jesus say happens to those who exalt themselves? They get humbled, and what happened to Adonijah? He got humbled. He was humiliated in front of everyone when he threw a huge party for himself, celebrating becoming king, but right at that moment he heard all the celebrating outside when his younger brother Solomon became king.

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Listen to these two verses...

- **Luke 1:50** God’s mercy is for those who fear Him.
- **Psa 103:11** For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him

This is a paradox:

- If you fear God you don’t have to be afraid of Him.
- But if you don’t fear God, you have a lot to fear from Him.

Think of the Ninevites:

- They were known for their cruelty and brutality.
- They had absolutely no fear of God.

**Jonah 3:4** says the prophet told the people, **“In forty days God is going to destroy your city.”**

They became afraid of God and repented. They had the greatest spiritual awakening in all of Scripture, and then God spared them:

- When they had no fear of God, they had everything to fear from God.
- When they feared God, they had nothing to fear from God.

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 The Bible is so full of paradoxes. Herbert Howell said, *“Without paradoxes, there is no Christianity.”*

Henry Clay Trumbull was a pastor and author. He lived from 1830 to 1903. He wrote a number of books and one of them is called, *“Practical Paradoxes; or, Truth in Contradictions.”* I was able to get a free copy of it off the Internet on Tuesday, and I want to read the first few sentences of chapter one...

*“The law of the Christian life is a paradox. It is made up of seeming contradictions. All its teachings are contrary to the common opinions of man. According to [God], giving is getting; scattering is gaining; holding is losing; having nothing is possessing all things; dying is living. It is he who is weak who is strong; it is he who defies danger who avoids it; it is he who loses his life who finds it. Self-interest is promoted by unselfishness; the pleasures of earth are surest to him who disregards them; happiness is found only when it is no longer sought; the clearest sight is of the invisible; things which are not, bring to naught things which are.”*

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 And this reveals why it’s so important to understand paradoxes. If you don’t understand them:

- You’re probably not going to understand the Bible.
- You’re probably not going to understand what God wants to say to you.

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 This is one of the main reasons people rejected Jesus’ teaching in His day. He spoke paradoxically and it confused His listeners. For example:

- In **Matthew 23:11** Jesus said, **“Whoever wants to be greatest, should be everyone’s servant.”**
- In **Mark 9:35** Jesus said, **“Anyone who wants to be first, must be the very last.”**

- Jesus began His public teaching with the Sermon on the Mount, which began with the Beatitudes, which is really a list of paradoxes. Just mentioning the first one, Jesus says the **poor in spirit** are the richest, b/c they **receive the kingdom of heaven**. To say the poor are the richest doesn't make sense.

These are the sorts of statements that divided Jesus' listeners:

- Some people heard Him and thought He was completely foolish.
- Other people heard Him and recognized He was teaching profound truths.

Listen to this account that reveals the divide between Jesus' hearers...

**John 7:40** When they heard [Jesus teach], some of the people said, "This really is the Prophet." **41** Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Is the Christ to come from Galilee?...**43** So there was a division among the people over him. At this point the religious leaders told some people to arrest Jesus...**45** The officers then came [back] to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?"  
**46** The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!"

You have two groups in this account:

- You have the religious leaders who you'd think would understand spiritual truth, but they thought everything Jesus said was foolish.
- Then you have these officers who were sent to arrest Jesus, and you would think they would think Jesus' teaching was foolish, but they were so moved by what He said they refused to arrest Him!

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Listen to this verse that explains the situation...

**1 Cor 2:14** The natural person – this refers to unbelievers, or people who don't have the Holy Spirit to reveal truth – or paradoxes – to them – **does not accept the things of the Spirit of God** (or doesn't understand paradoxes), **for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.**

But then listen to what Paul says two verses later...

**1 Cor 2:16** For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" **But WE HAVE THE MIND OF CHRIST.**

We can't understand God's thoughts - we can't teach Him - but we can understand spiritual truths if we have the mind of Christ.

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Think of the mind of God in the OT that has thoughts that are not our thoughts, and ways that are higher than our ways:

- That mind of God in the OT, became the mind of a Man in the NT when the Word of God – which is really to say the *logos* or wisdom and truth of God – became flesh and dwelt among us.

- When Christ was born He was a Man with the mind of God.

And Paul says we can have the **mind of Christ**, which allows us to understand spiritual truths. This is why in **Phil 2:5** he says **Have the mind [of Christ] among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.**

So if you happen to look at life differently than most of the world, that's wonderful:

- That means you're seeing things the way God sees them.
- Part of being a disciple of Christ is having a biblical worldview, and that means being able to understand paradoxes.

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By this point you can probably guess why we're having this discussion of paradoxes: we've reached one of the most well-known in all of Scripture. Before we read it, let me briefly give you the context...

Jesus is entering the third year of His earthly ministry:

- He is ending the Year of Popularity
- He is beginning the Year of Opposition.

After Jesus fed the 5,000 – or 20,000 – **John 6:66** says that **After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.**

So now Jesus begins to prepare the Twelve for two things:

1. First, He prepares them for the suffering He's going to experience: in **verse 22 He said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."**
2. Second, He prepares them for the suffering THEY'RE going to experience! In **verse 23 He said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.**

The disciples knew what this meant. They know it meant being willing to die for Jesus, which is what happened to all of them except John. So Jesus follows this up with a paradox that was meant to encourage them if they did lose their lives for Him. Look at **verse 24...**

**24 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.**

And this brings us to Lesson 3...

### **LESSON 3: GIVE UP THIS LIFE TO RECEIVE ETERNAL LIFE.**

This is the verse you want to hear from the Lord after He tells you that you're going to die for Him!

You immediately recognize the paradoxical nature of this verse:

- You can't lose your life and save it. Losing your life means you did NOT save it.
- You can't save your life and lose it. Saving your life means you did NOT lose it.

It's easier to understand this paradox if you break it in half. When Jesus says:

- **Whoever would save his life will lose it** He's referring to people who love this life and pursue all the ease, comfort, and acceptance the world offers:
  - These people will not find eternal life.
  - To save your life by living for yourself and living for what the world offers is to lose to your life.
- Then Jesus says **whoever loses his life for my sake will save it** refers to people who give up their lives for Christ:
  - Basically, losing your life means doing what **verse 23** said: **deny yourself, pick up your cross, follow Christ.**
  - People who do this will find eternal life.

When we lose our lives for Jesus it means giving up this life for Him. We surrender to Him, inviting Him to do whatever He wants with us, and use us in whatever ways He deems best.

It's the language of **Rom 12:1b**...

**Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.**

You're no longer living for yourself. You're living for the Lord. It's like Paul said in **Phil 1:21** that **to live is Christ.**

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Everything we've been discussing up to this point sounds terribly foolish to the world:

- To the world this is not the way to live your life. This is the way to waste your life.
- But to Christians this is the only way to live. Giving up your life for Christ is how to live life to the fullest.

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There's one part of this verse that I want you to notice, b/c I think it's particularly important. Look at the words **for My sake**. This clarifies something that we need to keep in mind...

Jesus talked about losing our lives, and who loses their life? We all do in two ways...

1. First, we all do in the sense that we all die.
2. Second, we all do in the sense that we all spend our lives some way. God has given us some amount time, energy, and resources and we all invest it in different ways.

And this brings us to Lesson 4...

## LESSON 4: JESUS WANTS A LIFE "LOST" FOR HIM.

When Jesus adds the words **for My sake** to the end of verse, He's showing that it's important how our lives are spent, and they have to be spent – or lost – for Him. Anyone can lose their life

– or spend their life in some number of ways – but Jesus is talking about our lives being lost – or spent – for Him.

Let me take your minds back to the sermon from two weeks ago, and in particular the discussion of denying ourselves...

Many people engage in significant amounts of self-denial or discomfort. There are lots of ways in life that we sacrifice, experience discomfort, and self-denial. For example, everyone who has ever:

- Accomplished anything...
- Succeeded in some way...
- Produced something...
- Run a business...
- Completed a project...
- Kept a job for any length of time...
- Obtained a degree...
- Finished a race...

Has engaged in an amount of self-denial, discomfort, and sacrifice. But it doesn't mean it's being done for Christ. With the words **for My sake**, Jesus makes the point that self-denial, discomfort, and sacrifice should be for Him.

Let me give you two examples from my life...

I used to be really into working out:

- I would push myself hard in the gym. I experienced a lot of discomfort and pain. There's nothing wrong with working out, and I still try to get some exercise in each day, but, it would be wrong for me to turn around and say I did that for Christ: *"This next set of squats is for You Jesus!"*
- I used to eat six meals per day, and they were terribly bland:
  - Lots of my friends used to make fun of me: plain chicken breasts, I wouldn't even think of dark meat b/c it was too fatty, tuna out of the can, green beans out of the can.
  - You wouldn't believe the lengths I went to to make sure I didn't miss a meal. I used to think if there were too many hours between meals my muscles would start shrinking. I experienced a lot of self-denial making sure I ate these meals at the right time.
  - Social settings were interrupted for me to go the car to eat food.
  - Every time there was dessert or something unhealthy you can imagine I denied myself.
  - One time I insulted an older woman who had us over for a special meal. I was afraid – and I was right – that there wouldn't be enough protein, so I was trying to eat my cold chicken breast discretely during dinner. I think I had it in my lap and I was pulling pieces off and putting it in my mouth. She caught me and got upset.

But it would be ridiculous for me to turn around and say I was denying myself for Christ. I did it, b/c I wanted to be muscular and strong.

Here's another example from my life...

There were times when I was taking classes, and I might put in hours and hours to get assignments done. I'll tell you one example that stands out...

Classes at Chapman University lasted 16 weeks. I had to take one online computer class. The syllabus showed all the assignments that were due, and I concluded that I could get them done during the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the class, or during the last 8 weeks. I wanted to wait until then b/c I was taking other classes at Chapman, coaching high school wrestling, and I was teaching elementary school.

Then one day – probably during the 6th or 7th week of the class, the professor emailed me and said, “I wanted to check in with you. I haven't received any of your assignments. Is everything okay?” I wrote back and explained the situation, telling her I'd start sending all my assignments during the last 8 weeks.

She wrote back and said, “Oh, I'm sorry, but I guess you missed that online classes are not like the other classes at Chapman. They're only 8 weeks in length.” She told me I could drop the class, which would mean losing some amount of money and delaying receiving my teaching credential. I had one available weekend – I guess there wasn't a wrestling tournament – and I locked the door, closed the blinds, and pretty much worked without stopping until the assignments were done. A lot of discomfort and self-denial – mostly denying sleep – but this wasn't done for Christ's sake.

The words **for My sake** are so important, b/c Jesus is letting us know that He's referring to:

- Sacrifice...
- Self-denial...
- Discomfort we experience...

**For [His] sake.**

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I used weightlifting and college classes as examples, but the same is true even with seemingly spiritual activities that aren't being done for Christ's sake. Let me give you an example of some individuals who looked religious, but Jesus made it clear they were simply doing it for themselves...

**Matt 6:1 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.**

This is interesting...

Doing righteous things is good, but Jesus says you can do righteous things and there's no reward for it if it's done to impress others...versus being done for Christ's sake.

So let me ask you:

- Do you practice your righteousness to be seen by others?
- Or are you doing it for Christ, so you're satisfied simply knowing the Lord sees what you're doing?

**2 “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**

Giving to the needy is honorable:

- It involves sacrifice and self-denial.
- You're parting with some of your possessions or hard-earned money.

But Jesus says there's no reward when people do it to look good, versus doing it for Christ's sake.

So let me ask you:

- When you give, do you hope others find out? Do you subtly say things or make decisions that increase the chances of others finding out just how generous you are?
- Or are you doing it for Christ, so you're satisfied simply knowing the Lord knows what you give?

**5 “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**

Again, prayer is a wonderful thing:

- It is hard.
- It involves an amount of self-denial.
- You have to give up doing other things to make time for it.

But Jesus says people who pray to impress others receive no reward b/c it's not done for His sake.

So let me ask you:

- Do you pray very spiritually when others are around? You seem very concerned about others, and you make sure your prayers are long and pious.
- But in your private life:
  - You rarely look at the church prayer list.

- You hardly lift up the burdens of others to the Lord.
- Your prayers are short and repetitive.

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When I look at the words **for My sake**, they make me examine my motivation as a disciple of Christ:

- Why do I study during the week? Why am I preaching this sermon? Is it b/c I want to look good, or is it b/c I want Christ to look good?
- Why do I want to be a pastor? Is it b/c I want a big church? Or is it b/c I want to serve Christ and His people?
- Why do I train my children? Is it b/c I want to look like I'm a good parent, or is it b/c I want to raise disciples of Christ?

I hope the words **for My sake**, encourage you to examine your motivations too:

- Why do you do what you do...even those things that look good and spiritual?
  - Are you doing them b/c you want to look good?
  - Or are you doing them, b/c you want Christ to look good?

Let me close with these two verses...

**Col 3:23-24 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.**

If you have any questions about anything I shared this morning, Pastor Doug and I will be up front after service and we'd consider it a privilege to have the opportunity to speak with you.

Let's pray.